

Creating a map to bridge differences

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When we are working with teachers on their curriculum, we often find ourselves having to reinforce the idea that it's important to do the tasks that we'd like our students to do. This is sometimes called dogfooding—it's slang in the corporate world for testing your own product to work out the kinks. Teachers should complete their own tasks to make sure that the product generated by students in response to the task is the product the teacher was expecting students to create. Another reason for dogfooding in education is to anticipate the range of responses. Anticipating how students could potentially respond to a task (either in the correct or incorrect space) provides an opportunity for teachers to pre-plan for differentiation and contingency work based on what student responses tell the teacher about where the students are in their learning.

We've found success using a Continuum of Potential Responses tool (Mihalakis & Renner, 2016) with teachers to plan for instruction. The tool, shown below and completed for a task on an excerpt from Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* (2015), asks teachers to consider both less valid and more valid responses to a task, what those responses tell teachers about where students are in their learning, and how teachers might differentiate instructional next steps based on where students are.

This work first begins by asking teachers to identify an "ideal" response and rationale for why the response is ideal. In this example, teachers were identifying the ideal response to the question "What is Coates saying about race in this text?"

"Ideal" Response: The progress of Americans is built on violence towards black bodies (lines 12–16). Race is used in America to keep

a hierarchy (lines 41–43) and is a modern invention of racism used to destroy and humiliate people (lines 33–34; 39–40; 46). Coates is also saying that how race is defined will continue to change over time to keep the "ruling class" in charge (47–50).

Why Is That Response Ideal?

This response gets major parts of Coates argument about race in America—that race is a construct used to oppress and control to keep the "ruling class" in power. It shows that students have a clear grasp of the content of the text that can be built upon as students move through additional tasks.

Teachers then prepare for work that will bridge the gaps between where students are in their understanding of a text or of content and where they need to be to move forward in the work and toward the learning goal, rather than marching through a sequence of work in lock step.

One of our urban partner districts has begun to utilize this document as a co-planning tool for teachers of English learners (ELs) and their

ELA counterparts. The document provides an entry point for teachers to have a conversation around how ELs may respond to complex texts and tasks, and allows teachers the opportunity to work together to co-plan for difference—to think

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together around differentiated instruction and potential next steps to bridge gaps in student understanding around the texts and content. Having teachers of ELs and content-area teachers work together facilitates conversations around how to help ELs engage with complex texts and tasks, something that many content-area teachers have expressed frustration over knowing how to do. However, a critical component of utilizing this document, and something that is frequently a hurdle, is finding time for teachers

to work together to anticipate a range of student responses. Shared PLC time among teachers of ELs and content-area teachers has proven to be an ideal time to work through co-planning instruction.

When teachers begin to use the Continuum of Potential Responses tool during their co-planning time, we recommend that they start by discussing the ideal response(s) to the task they will be planning. This ideal response is what you would expect to hear if students totally got the text and the task you were asking them to respond to (not just what you think, say, a 10th grader would say). Teachers then work from the ideal responses to anticipate what their students might say in response to the task to create a map of differentiated next steps. We always recommend that teachers come back together after working with students to revise the Continuum of Potential Responses with the actual responses that students give and to refine the next steps based on those responses. This will provide a more complete map that you can use (and continue to revise) with future students. ■

Continuum of Potential Responses			
First, do the task and brainstorm as many possible responses as you can, preferably with colleagues. Consider writing each response on a sticky note so you can then group similar responses before filling out the chart below. The number of categories will vary; add or subtract columns as needed.			
	<i>Less valid</i> <i>More valid</i>
Category/Response Type	Invalid	Literal, but doesn't make the leap to the big ideas	Ideal response/What I should hear from students to know they got it.
Sample of Potential Response(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coates is a TV reporter. Coates was a slave. Coates' son was shot. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Coates gave an interview on TV and the reporter misunderstood.</i> <i>Coates stated that whites were successful because of looting and violence.</i> <i>Black people are being killed.</i> 	The progress of Americans is built on violence towards black bodies (lines 12-16). Race is used in America to keep a hierarchy (lines 41-43) and is a modern invention of racism used to destroy and humiliate people (lines 33-34; 39-40; 46). Coates is also saying that how race is defined will continue to change over time to keep the "ruling class" in charge (47-50).
Diagnosis	Student is making unwarranted claims based on information in the text. They are comprehending words in the text, but then incorrectly ascribing those words/experiences to Coates.	Student understands what's happening in the text, but can't get at Coates' overall message and why he is writing this text.	This response gets at major parts of Coates' argument about race in America – that race is a construct used to oppress and control to keep the "ruling class" in power. It shows that students have a clear grasp of the content of the text.
Potential Next Steps	For these two groups of students: Reread <i>Between the World and Me</i> . As you read, pay attention to natural breaks in the text—places where Coates transitions to new topics or ideas. Mark those places. Then, go back and reread each section. What is Coates saying in each section? How does each section build from the ones before it and contribute to the whole? (done in pairs).		These students are ready to move on to the next task; however, considering the density of Coates' text, they may benefit from work with the contingency task as well (individually)